

Updated Response to Site Review Team's Review of the Texas Sea Grant College Program Conducted 10-11 May 2011

Recommendations:

1. The TXSG Advisory Committee should have a stronger and more active role in providing input to the Program.

We finalized a Texas Sea Grant Advisory Committee Charter in 2012 to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Committee and TXSG (<http://texasseagrant.org/about/advisory-committee/>) and to give the committee a stronger and more active role in advising our Program. Since 2012, we have met annually with the Advisory Committee, all TXSG staff have attended nearly all of these meetings to build a greater awareness about the depth and breadth of our Program, and we have engaged the Advisory Committee in visioning and strategic planning.

2. A clear statement is needed for the role of the Advisory Committee with the TXSG Program.

We finalized a Texas Sea Advisory Committee Charter in 2012 that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Committee and TXSG (<http://texasseagrant.org/about/advisory-committee/>):

- identify needs, opportunities and priorities that can or should be addressed by TXSG programs;
- help create new connections, collaborations, partnerships and funding opportunities that will potentially further TXSG's mission or provide resources for TXSG programs;
- advise on TXSG vision, mission, strategic plan, goals and priorities;
- educate and inform state and national decision-makers of the relevance and value of TXSG programs;
- provide input to TXSG review and monitoring processes including evaluate progress towards TXSG strategic plan and periodic internal and national program reviews.

3. A more broadly-based membership for the Advisory Committee is recommended, with periodic rotation of committee members within each classification.

We invited new members to join the committee in 2012 to broaden diversity in geographic representation, gender, ethnicity and vocation. These individuals represent industry, tourism, recreational boating and fishing, independent school districts, non-governmental organizations, coastal community managers, local elected officials from the county commissioners' offices, and different state agencies including the Texas General Land Office. All members now serve four-year, staggered terms that ensure rotation of members every two years and allows for a continuous renewal.

4. The Program should make sure that University administrators are keenly aware of the importance of state matching funds to the receipt of the Federal Sea Grant appropriation.

University administrators are keenly aware of the importance of state matching funds to the receipt of the Federal Sea Grant appropriation. The Director has communicated directly with the Former President, Interim President, Provost and Dean, and plans to communicate with the incoming university President, to ensure they are informed about the importance of state matching funds. As turnover has occurred in the leadership of the Vice President for Research Office at Texas A&M University since 2011, the Director has met with each Vice President to discuss the importance of state matching funds to the Program, educated them about the Program, its funding history and the vital role it plays in the University's mission.

Texas Sea Grant's state budget has been a part of the Texas A&M University System's Higher Education Special Item funding since 1969. Each year, the System formally presents a budget request on our behalf to the Texas Legislative Budget Board. We work with Texas A&M's Government Relations team annually to submit a Special Item funding request, and the Director meets with Texas Legislative Budget Board staff to educate them about the Program and the importance of state matching funds. Finally, we developed new outreach materials specifically for visits to state, federal and key university administrative offices to underscore the significant

15:1 return-on-investment: for every state dollar this Program receives, we return \$15 non-state dollars to the Texas economy.

5. Subcontracts issued to off-campus institutions should carry, at the maximum, the off-campus indirect cost rate rather than the on-campus rate. This allows more program funds to go to program activities.

Texas A&M University pays all sub-recipients their full federally negotiated indirect cost rate on the entire amount of the sub-award. This is required by the Uniform Administrative Requirements (2 CFR Part 200). Texas A&M University recovers full federally negotiated indirect costs on only the first \$25,000 of each sub-award it issues to sub-recipients.

6. We recommend that TXSG be forward thinking and visionary to determine its future.

With the tremendous amount of input and critical feedback we have received from our stakeholders, including those represented in our Advisory Committee, we have been forward thinking and visionary in evolving our Program to better meet the needs of Texas and Texans. Some key Program changes that have helped us in this regard include: engaging a more diverse set of stakeholders; increasing our engagement with state agencies, federal partners in Texas, universities and industry to better understand their needs; strengthening our partnerships with our coastal university campuses and opening new offices in these key locations; significantly increasing the amount of support for our Extension Team while decreasing the resources devoted to Administration; hiring new Specialists and Agents on our Extension Team, including the first Social Scientist; increasing our funding from sponsored projects that have a local as well as regional scope; communications efforts that include resurrecting our successful magazine, *Texas Shores*, developing a social media presence, increasing the number of press releases and developing new outreach materials; and strengthening our relationship with Texas A&M University by moving our Headquarters office back to campus in 2012, increasing our support of undergraduate and graduate research students and engaging the university and Brazos Valley in an Ocean Awareness Campaign funded by the Office of the Provost.

7. The TXSG Program should employ a more comprehensive stakeholder survey that encompasses the geographic, topical, and cultural diversity along the Texas coast.

In 2012, as we began developing our 2014-2017 Strategic Plan, we engaged hundreds of individuals across the State of Texas in a stakeholder survey. We conducted two separate surveys. The first survey was comprised of the questions that were developed by the National Sea Grant Strategic Planning Committee. We placed these questions into a google form, sent a request to our Researcher Listserv, and solicited input from researchers from throughout the State of Texas. We received feedback from 29 researchers. These same strategic planning questions were the focus of our 2012 Advisory Committee; we received critical feedback from our Committee and used these questions again during our 2015 Advisory Committee meeting. The second survey instrument, developed for the public by our Extension Team, employed Texas A&M Agrilife Extension's web-based survey system. This public survey launched on April 2012, was widely publicized across the State of Texas and solicited input through August 2012. We received 971 responses to this comprehensive survey, which encompassed the geographic, topical, and cultural diversity across Texas. We plan to conduct another survey in 2015 that will be used in the development of our next strategic plan.

Suggestions:

1. Although budgets are tight, consideration should be given to having a dedicated staff person oversee the research portfolio.

We hired a full time Research Coordinator in 2013 to oversee the research portfolio. This position was recently vacated March 2015 and will be filled June 2015.

2. The SRT suggests that TXSG informally re-evaluate whether the current location remains the best model for the TXSG Program and continue to explore options for location of the Program on the main campus.

The Program Headquarters office moved from off-campus office space to the Texas A&M University main campus in 2012 (College Station). In addition, we opened up a new office on the campus of the Texas A&M University at Galveston, where our Extension Program Leader and Social Scientist are now based, and added additional staff to our Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi office.

3. The program should consider the implementation of a Sea Grant scholar program, or similar, to help publicize Sea Grant graduate student support and facilitate tracking of these students.

We launched a Texas Sea Grant Scholars Program in 2012, in partnership with Texas A&M University's Honors Program (<http://texasseagrant.org/funding/undergraduate-sea-grant-scholars-program/>). We also launched the competitive Texas Sea Grant Grants-in-Aid of Graduate Research Program in 2013 (<http://texasseagrant.org/funding/grants-in-aid-of-graduate-research-program-request-for-proposals/>) for students at Texas A&M University, Texas A&M University at Galveston, and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. We meet with these students annually and follow their progress while they are at their universities and after they graduate.

4. Examine new opportunities for educational programming for youth, family and adult coastal and statewide audiences, particularly focusing on underserved audiences. Investigate potential approaches to better understanding how different audiences learn when they can choose when, what, and how to learn (e.g., free-choice learning).

One of our greatest accomplishments is the programming our Extension Team provides to Texans through their youth, family and adult programming. Our Extension Agents do much of this through the Texas Master Naturalist Program, a collaboration with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M Agrilife. Through this program, we reach tens of

thousands of Texans and educate and engage them in meaningful ways that help Texas coastal communities.

One new educational program, the Brazos Valley Ocean Awareness Program, funded by Texas A&M University's Office of the Provost, enabled us to develop a new on-campus program featuring a 300-gallon aquarium (Aglantis) located in the heart of the campus to engage students, their families, faculty and staff; a related program reaches out to local schools in the Brazos Valley with smaller aquaria (Aglantis, Jr.) that we set up in their classrooms to connect them to us, the university and the Gulf of Mexico (<http://texasseagrant.org/programs/aglantis/>).

5. Continue the practice of in-person visits across the state to meet with potential PIs, but extend to campuses outside of the TAMU and University of Texas systems, including other public and private academic and research institutions that house marine science talent.

Since 2011, we have contacted all Texas universities and colleges, requested contact information for people on their campuses who can help distribute our RFPs, and added their contact information to our researcher listserv. This has enabled us to communicate funding opportunity announcements to a much broader group of potential PIs and to campuses outside the TAMU and UT Systems. We have visited many of these campuses since 2011, met with their researchers and educated them about our funding opportunities.

In 2015 we reached out across the State of Texas to present a webinar to researchers interested in the Texas Sea Grant Request for Research Proposal FY2016-2018 (<http://texasseagrant.org/assets/uploads/resources/Webinar.pdf>). More than 100 people from all across the State of Texas participated in this webinar.

6. Work with NSGO and University Research Services to ensure efficient and effective processes and personnel, perhaps by transitioning to a common SG fiscal platform (e.g., the Maryland or MIT system).

Texas A&M University reorganized its research administration in 2011, replacing University Research Services with the Office of Sponsored Research Services (OSRS), which has provided our Program with outstanding service.

We began using the eSeaGrant system in 2013 and have been actively involved in the redevelopment of this tremendous resource along with the other Sea Grant Programs who are using this system.

7. The Director and staff should explore the options for acquiring additional funding from all sources, including federal and state agencies not ordinarily approached, as well as foundations and private donations.

We have significantly increased the number of proposals submitted to additional funding sources, including federal and state agencies, foundations and non-profits. From 2011 to 2014, we doubled the number of proposals submitted to external sponsors and we doubled the amount of funding we receive from sponsored programs.

8. The Director should work with the University's government relations office to optimize state lobbying procedures for TXSG, with potential joint visits of University and Sea Grant staff to legislative offices.

The Director works very closely with the Texas A&M University's Government Relations Team to optimize visits with key state legislative offices. The Director meets annually with the group, which facilitates meetings between the Director and key legislative staff from the Texas. In addition, Texas House and Senate members receive our Program's signature magazine, *Texas Shores*, as well as other publications such as our 2014 Annual Report.

9. Continue to nurture a strong working relationship with Texas AgriLife Extension and encourage reporting of impacts that reflect both AgriLife and TXSG in their mutual and separate reporting systems and impacts.

We have strengthened our relationship with Texas A&M Agrilife since 2011 and continue to seek opportunities to grow this important partnership. In 2014, our new Extension Program Leader convened a meeting of the Texas A&M Agrilife Leadership, including the individuals who supervise our jointly appointed Extension Specialists and Agents. This was the first meeting of its kind and has enhanced the relationship.

Our Agents and Specialists' impacts and accomplishments continue to be reported in the two separate systems. However, much of the data that is collected by the AgriLife System is used by our Program and entered into PIER. We created a new position and hired a Reporting Coordinator in 2102 to streamline our reporting practices. We also developed a Reporting Procedures Manual in 2014 and continue to work towards minimizing the reporting burden on individuals who work for the two distinct organizations.

10. Encourage the active participation of AgriLife leadership at the state and local areas in the visioning processes.

We have invited AgriLife leadership to serve on our Advisory Committee and help with our visioning process through the Committee, but thus far they have declined these invitations. Many of our current Advisory Committee members terms will end in 2015, and we will once again invite AgriLife leadership to serve on this important Committee.

We also encouraged AgriLife leadership to take part in the surveys that we conducted in 2012 to help with our visioning process. We do not know if they completed the surveys because the surveys were anonymous.

11. SRT suggests that a formal MOU would be useful, in case of staffing changes.

A formal MOU between Texas Sea Grant and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service was signed in October 2013.

12. Develop significant interactions of its extension personnel in activities, in planning, in research and in engagement with relevant academic units of the university, particularly with the College of Geosciences and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Include promising interactions with non-traditional schools and Departments, such as the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, the Bush School of Government and Public Service, the College of Education and Human Development, and the Mays Business School.

We have expanded our reach to partner with all of the academic units highlighted by the SRT, with the exception of the Mays Business School. We will continue to increase our reach across Texas A&M University, as well as across other university campuses in Texas.

13. TXSG should continue to investigate the application of new communication tools (e.g., smartphone apps, social media) for extension personnel, educators and communicators.

We have pursued many new communication avenues since 2011.

Website: We have redesigned our website twice since 2011. The most recent redesign included the transition to a content management system that allows individual staff to curate their own project pages. In addition, the new website is integrated with MailChimp and has facilitated the development of two new Program e-newsletters – one devoted to our Research Program, the other devoted to our overall Program, titled “Texas Sea Grant Tidings.” These newsletters communicate important information about our program to our stakeholders.

Social media: Our primary presence is on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. The number of “likes” on our Facebook page has doubled since 2012 and continues to grow weekly. We use the platform to communicate information about our Program events, Gulf Sea Grant Programs’ events and other local and regional news relevant to Texans, and use Facebook to feed our Twitter account. On Pinterest, we have uploaded our seafood recipe cards, and these recipes have been pinned by thousands of people since 2012.

Webinars: We have held several webinars since 2012 and will continue to grow this communication avenue. In a state as big as Texas, webinars provide a great opportunity for us to reach people who might otherwise not have the ability or mobility to connect with us in person. This adds a great new dimension to our outreach and education capabilities and programs.

14. TXSG should consider a range of options for electronic publication of Texas Shores, based on assessing audiences and use of new technology.

We resurrected the Program’s signature magazine, *Texas Shores*, in December 2011. This publication is available in print and electronically via PDF download from our website; electronic subscribers are notified when the new issue is available. The magazine currently has almost 6,000 print subscribers and is also distributed widely at events around the state.

15. The outcomes from these new and existing communications avenues should routinely be submitted to the National Sea Grant Library and the National Sea Grant Office.

Program communication products are now submitted routinely to the National Sea Grant Library. The number of communications products reported to the National Sea Grant Library has increased from 19 in 2011 to 61 in 2013.

16. Continue these important interactions and re-consider the future of the NSSL agent and the future NERR agent, and look for opportunities to continue these interactions as employees retire.

We continue to look for opportunities to grow our Extension Team. Since 2011, as staff retired, we have opened a new office at the Texas A&M University at Galveston campus and greatly expanded our Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi/Harte Research Institute office. In these offices, new staff includes the Extension Program Leader, a Healthy Coastal Ecosystems and Social Science Specialist, a Marine Economist, an Oil Spill Science Outreach Coordinator, and a Coastal Planning Specialist (position currently vacant).

In 2015 we hope to grow our Extension Team and continue the interactions with the NERR and NSSL, as well as others.

17. Continue to work to formalize an engagement effort with FEMA to provide significant local expertise before disasters arise.

We have had significant productive meetings with FEMA this year, have developed a plan for collaboration and entered into a Cooperating Technical Partners Partnership Agreement in 2014. This will significantly increase our Program's capacity to provide hazard mitigation expertise to local communities across Texas.

18. Re-consider the amount of management team efforts devoted to similar efforts across the Sea Grant Network and county-based agents contributing to larger networks. The SRT realizes that restrictions on travel funds and other issues exist; however, interactions with Sea Grant colleagues represent career development and beneficial 'cross-fertilization' with other agents

who work on similar topics. Such collaborations could benefit their day-to-day activities and the Sea Grant Network.

Since 2011, Program staff have contributed to the Sea Grant Network and attended network-wide events that have enhanced their professional development. We have made travel funds available to all staff so that they can attend network events, as well as other regional and national events that enhance their professional development and benefit the network. Examples of Sea Grant-related committees we serve on and events we have participated in include: Gulf Sea Grant Programs' Climate Community of Practice meeting held annually, convened in Texas in 2013; Gulf of Mexico Regional Sea Grant Meeting in 2013, with expected participation in another meeting in 2015 ; Sea Grant Week 2014; Sea Grant Academy; Sea Grant Association Board of Directors; Sea Grant Association External Relations Committee; Sea Grant Week 2014 Planning Committee; Sea Grant Extension Assembly and Communicators' Network Meeting; Fiscal Officers Network Meeting; meetings for the Gulf-based Sea Grant Oil Spill Science Outreach Program; Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Workgroup; Sea Grant Climate Network; and the Sea Grant Sustainable Coastal Development Network.

19. In order to be able to remain flexible in the face of these issues (hazard events, disaster recovery, economic crises), time and program funds must be committed. The SRT suggests that a process be formalized to capture expenses devoted to disaster response and lost work/revenues and SG personnel receive training in order to expedite future claims to recoup these costs.

We are working to address this suggestion and welcome feedback from the Site Review Team on best practices from the Network.